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\$10 million worth of Kremlinology



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WASHINGTON — In an effort to remedy a dangerous national shortage of experts on the Soviet Union, Averell Harriman went up to Columbia University last week and announced the biggest outflow of family cash since Butch Cassidy quit robbing his daddy's trains.

Harriman, former ambassador to Moscow and governor of New York, donated \$10 million to expand the University's Russian Institute—henceforth to be named the W. Averell Harriman Institute for the Advanced Study of the Soviet Union. It will train graduate students in Soviet affairs, bring scholars together for research and, in the long run, try to replace the brilliant generation of Sovietologists who were trained during and after World War II and who are now near retirement.

Money is nice, of course, especially \$10 million. But it is only part of the answer to the critical problem the nation faces as it seeks to fathom its most dangerous adversary. The biggest obstacle to building a new generation of academically disciplined experts on Soviet affairs is quackery. The field, unfortunately, is filled with a variety of charlatans, entrail-readers, Cold Warriors, Red baiters, conspiracy mongers and intellectual panderers. They are not a majority, necessarily, but there are enough of them still around to poison the atmosphere for honest intellectual research.

Genuine experts abound. But, more than 20 years after the end of the Cold War, they still suffer, from time to time, from a latter-day version of McCarthyism. President Reagan, for example, coming into office with the conviction that the Russians are chronic liars and cheaters who exist on a diet of sawdust, turned his back on virtually every experienced Soviet expert in the nation.

Henry Kissinger's brilliant adviser, Helmut Sonnenfeldt, was tainted, in right-wing eyes, by his service during the attempt at detente and was virtually hounded out of public life. Cyrus Vance's house expert, Marshall Shulman, returned to Columbia (where he will run the

Harriman Institute). He had been dubbed "Mr. Softee" by right-wingers. William Hyland, also a Kissinger aide, left government service rather than face the badgering of Sen. Jesse Helms of North Carolina and his clique of yahoo know-nothings.

Even Malcolm Toon, the hawkish, crusty, acid-tongued, copper-bottomed, curmudgeonly and thoroughly enjoyable ambassador to Moscow under Presidents Ford and Carter, found the Reagan team too pig-headed for his tastes. "I wouldn't work for those right-wing bastards," he said, and went off to play golf in North Carolina.

With this sort of future to look forward to, what is there to lure a bright young graduate student into Soviet affairs? There is no trade to speak of, so big bucks from big business are not to be had. The universities will provide a few jobs. The newspapers will take a handful of graduates; the State Department and Central Intelligence Agency a few more.

But even then, when you get the job, you find the quacks: the "experts" who will tell a President Reagan exactly what he wants to hear. "Don't worry, Mr. President, all we have to do is spend a few hundred billion more on defense and we'll starve the Russians into submission," they say.

BECAUSE MANY of the nation's universities have left Russian-language training in the hands of professors of literature (who find teaching a language beneath their dignity), there are, today, Soviet "experts" who speak no Russian, who literally do not know their *zhopa* from a *yama* (this means exactly what you think it means). There are analysts of Soviet affairs at the CIA who have never been to Russia. There are FBI agents who are as ill-informed about the KGB as the KGB is about them (and the KGB can be awfully, awfully dumb).

This is the challenge that faces Shulman, at Columbia, as he seeks to spend the Harriman money to recruit the best and brightest minds into his program. It is to make a life in Soviet affairs intellectually honest, financially worthwhile and professionally satisfying.

It's got to be done, or else Russia will again become, as Churchill said, "a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma." Then all that Harriman money would have been better spent, as Butch Cassidy would have spent it, on women and whisky and a slow boat to Bolivia.